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HPESB releases next school year budget

By Sarah Sobanski

Hastings Prince Edward District School Board has approved its operating budget at almost $200 million and its capital budget at around $23.5 million.

Provincial funding will make up the majority of the HPEDSB operating budget at more than $150 million. The next largest portion will be made up in local taxation at $42.3 million.

Highest expenses for HPEDSB operations will be in instruction, totalling $151 million - up $3.7 million from last year. It's a large gap to the second highest expense for the board.

"The budget is slightly bigger than last year. Where you'll see increases mainly is because there were negotiated settlements for salary increases for most employee group ... Instruction is where we would have teachers. That's where those salaries would come out of - teachers and classroom expenses," said director of education Mandy Savery-Whiteway.

Pupil accommodation makes up the second largest expense at around $25 million. It's costing $1.2 million more in this year's budget. These are expenses to operate schools including cleaning, maintenance, supplies, services and staffing.

HPEDSB will also receive $2.6 million as a part of the province's new Greenhouse Gas Reduction Fund. The fund is allocating $200 million to boards across Ontario to support energy saving infrastructure improvements. This will help many schools to use more energy-efficient appliances in their premises, from energy-saving heat pumps (heat pump manufacturer companies are available to research) to light bulbs. Every small change makes a big difference.

"It will be used for boiler replacements, Greensboro heat pump replacements, geothermal upgrades, building automation system updates and lighting retrofits," said communications and freedom of information officer for the board Kerry Donnell.

The board's 2016 to 2019 Multi-Year Financial Recovery Plan focuses on making staff reductions, consolidating and closing school and finding savings. Savery-Whiteway said the plan was required by the ministry because of the deficit that they had previously had.

"The board has over 6,000 excess student spaces and we've been undergoing some accommodation review processes to address not only our ability to offer student programing but also financial stability." Once these spaces have been used up, it might then be time to look towards the likes of Bloomsburg student housing and other providers to better accommodate any students that don't yet have somewhere to stay.

According to a budget document presented at the board's June 19 meeting, this plan "requires the board to develop a financial budget for 2017-'18 that is balanced or contains a small in-year surplus for 2017-'18 while allowing for contingencies."

"This year we actually had to realize $6 million in savings in order to present a balanced budget," said Savery-Whiteway. "It is a variety of things. Some of it will come from two school consolidations that have now been confirmed for September. Others will come from - unfortunately - reductions in staffing but we also have looked at reductions to overall budgets across the system including professional development budgets and some school budgets."

Hillcrest School in Belleville and Pinecrest Memorial Elementary School in Bloomfield will close as a result of the board's accommodation reviews.

The budget projected just over $3,000 in surplus including all steps in the plan - a significant change from 2016-'17 which saw a $1 million deficit. According to the board, the budget follows the plan "except that only two elementary schools are considered to close as a result of consolidation for 2017-2018, rather than the four elementary schools proposed in the plan."

President for Ontario Secondary School Teachers' Federation District 29 Scott Marshall said the union is disappointed with the budget.

"We are very disappointed to see that the school board has decided to cut the secondary school budgets that support classroom learning, co-cirricular activities, and extra-cirricular activities that work together to support student success in our schools," said Marshall in an OSSTF District 29 release. "This unbalanced approach to the board's funding challenges demonstrates a willingness to sacrifice resources that directly support student learning, while unnecessarily increasing the size of their management team."

"We have not previously made any reductions to school budgets and I really want to emphasize that reducing school budgets is not our preference. We're really hopeful that this will be temporary because we really want to work to implement the Mulit-Year Financial Recovery Plan over the next three years, reestablish financial stability and then revisit our decisions," said Savery-Whiteway.

HPEDSB is expecting a 93 student increase in enrollment. More than 110 elementary students are projected to enroll in elementary schooling while secondary schooling will see a 20 student decrease.

School condition improvement was budgeted at close to $14 million. Around $4 million will go to finishing Marmora Senior Public

School.

"Trent River Public School is now complete, you see expenses there of just over $4.9 million for this year but the main one for next year and we're quite excited about it is Marmora Public School - as it now is being called ? will be opening in March of 2018 and it will have a significant renovation and addition," said Savery-Whiteway.